

Parliamentarians and the Agenda for Mine Action 1

Chair: The Honourable Sheila Finestone

P.C., M.P., President, Inter-Parliamentary Union Group, Canada

Achille Occhetto

Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee,

Chamber of Deputies, Italy

Mr. Occhetto said that women and children, generally those from the poorer segments of society, are often the victims of landmines. Moral outrage and the potential for stigmatization by others first put pressure on governments to take action. Parliamentarians must continue to work with NGOs to ensure that the Convention is implemented.

He stressed that the Convention, which will be signed by so many countries, was an example of globalization, and that it replaced purely nationalistic interests. In this trend, parliamentarians will continue to involve themselves internationally, he added.

There must now be central coordination to make the most of the reserves of all countries. However, there is far to go to put an end to this humanitarian crisis. Many countries — often the highly developed countries — legally protect the manufacture and sale of landmines.

While all abstaining countries must be persuaded to add their endorsements to the Convention, it is also very important to persuade those countries still producing and selling landmines to endorse the Convention.

He added that the Italian Parliament has enacted a new law prohibiting landmines. All anti-personnel mines have been outlawed, together with any other mines that are designed for the purposes and that can be converted into anti-personnel mines.

Mr. Tony Cunningham

Member of the European Parliament

Mr. Cunningham said that the anti-landmine issue is primarily a moral one. He added that it is vital that the Convention be ratified and implemented and that non-signers be persuaded to sign as soon as possible. Parliamentarians often need help to get the real picture — a picture that is not always given by diplomats and official advisors — and herein lies the value of NGOs.

He noted that he himself came to the landmine issue through an active, anti-mine organization in his home constituency in Cumbria, and that, as a member of that organization, he wrote a landmine report for the European Parliament calling for a public inquiry into landmines. He said he makes a point of raising the subject of landmines to both non-supporting groups and supporters whenever possible. He added that it is the role of parliamentarians to act as liaisons between public expectations and the government.

A working group for the Parliament, which represents 370 million people, also called for a global ban. This group continues to move the process forward and will urge European states to ratify the Convention as soon as possible.

Many organizations will be involved in rehabilitating victims of mines and in demining lands. These organizations should sign a statement of principle detailing how the work should be done. Legislators will create the controls to ensure that public money, which is the main source of funding, is spent wisely, and that tasks are carried out efficiently. He added that mines should be removed first from areas where their presence prevents farming, even if there are few mines, rather than from less used areas, even those with a large number of mines. Certainly there is no quick fix, he added. There is a need for increased resources for mine clearance and victim assistance.